There are several ways to use commas. You can make any paper more polished by using them correctly.

Where to Use Commas:

- After *first, second*, and so on when it introduces a series; between two or more adjectives of equal rank that modify the same noun; and after every item in a series of three or more except for the last one. **Example:** When packing for a long hike, follow these steps: first, pack comfortable, easy-care clothing; second, pack toiletries such as soap, shampoo, and sunscreen; and third, include first-aid supplies or medicines you may need.

- After introductory words or mild interjections such as *oh, yes, no,* and *well;* after an introductory prepositional phrase that contains additional prepositional phrases; and after verbal phrases, adverb clauses, and adverbs used as introductory elements. **Examples:** Yes, it’s important to plan the trip carefully. In an emergency in the forest, these items will come in handy.

- To set off words of direct address, such as names, titles, terms of respect, and phrases used to address an individual directly; and to set off one or more words that interrupt the flow of thought in a sentence. **Example:** Tina, you are ready, or so it seems, to begin your trek.

- To set off these nonessential elements: clauses, participial phrases, and appositives. **Example:** This trail, which my brother walked last year, will be difficult.

- To set off the explanatory words of a direct quotation, such as *she said.* **Example:** “Tell me more,” she said, “about Native American tribes.”

- Before the coordinating conjunction (*for, and, nor, but, or, yet,* or *so*) that joins the two independent clauses of a compound sentence. **Example:** Columbus thought he had reached the Indies, and he called the native people he met here *Indians.*

- To separate words or phrases that might be mistakenly joined when they are read. **Example:** While hunting, Indians crossed the Bering Strait into North America.

- To indicate the words left out of a parallel word group, or word groups that repeat the same structure. **Example:** The Cree lived in bark tepees; the Chippewa, in domed lodges.

- After the salutation of a friendly letter and after its closing.

- In numerals of 1,000 and above. **Example:** He won $7,375,752 in the lottery.

- Between cities and states. **Example:** I am going to San Diego, California this weekend.

Beware Comma Splices:

A comma splice is a type of error that happens when two complete sentences are joined *only* by a comma. Here is an example of a comma splice: *Sarah has been my best friend for years, we first met in kindergarten.* Remember the comma rules listed above to avoid comma splices.